

ACCESSLETTER

Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities

Disability Advocates Urge Caution on Social Security Reform

When members of President Bush's Social Security reform commission met in Washington this summer, disability advocates urged that the reformers exercise caution and carefully consider the needs of Americans with disabilities. They pointed out that, in addition to providing retirement benefits, the Social Security Administration (SSA) provides disability insurance protection for 130 million working Americans. Through two programs, Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI), the SSA provides benefits to nearly seven million working-age individuals with disabilities.

Moreover, according to SSA, a 20-year-old worker today has a 3-in-10 chance of becoming disabled before reaching retirement age. Disability activists argue that attempts to modernize the Social Security system should neither harm people who currently receive disability benefits nor should they compromise benefits for workers who become disabled in the future.

The General Accounting Office (GAO), according to a January 2001 report, said that despite the strong impetus to modernize the Social Security system, "there has not been much analysis of how the various Social Security reform proposals will affect the SSDI program." The GAO report concluded that, while many SSDI beneficiaries could see increases in benefits under various reform proposals, a significant number would receive lower benefits.

The reform proposals GAO studied tended to treat SSDI beneficiaries as similar to retirement beneficiaries even though the circumstances facing disabled workers are different from those facing retired workers. These differences suggest that Social Security reform proposals should be evaluated not only in light of their effects on retired workers but also explicitly for their effect on disabled beneficiaries and their families.

Disability policy experts also express concern that, while Bush's Social Security reform commission embraces a principle of "no change in Social Security benefits for retirees

or near-retirees," the commission makes no such pledge for disabled Americans. Instead, it merely promises to keep the SSDI and SSI programs intact.

"In this push to reform, people with disabilities are once again being left out of the equation," said Lorraine Greiff, director of the Massachusetts Office on Disability. "Allowing workers to put a portion of their Social Security contributions into the stock market may reduce the security and protection that's necessary if you find yourself unexpectedly disabled." Disability advocates are critical of the fact that Bush's Social Security reform commission lacks representation from the disability community.

"Everybody's been invited to the table to discuss Social Security issues except leaders in the disability

community," said Greiff. "It's past time that our voices be present at the table when issues affecting us are decided."

Other disability advocates point out that Bush's reform panel must also take into account existing initiatives that seek to eliminate or reduce barriers to employment. Marca Bristo, chairperson of the National Council on Disability (NCD), states that "We must make tough choices to strengthen and protect Social Security over the long run. Social Security programs can be transformed from a lifelong entitlement into an investment in employment potential for thousands of people."

The NCD urges that any new recommendations developed by Social Security reform be fully in line with the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 (TWWIIA) as well as Bush's own New Freedom Initiative (NFI). Both TWWIIA and NFI seek to provide states with new options and flexibility that will make it possible for people with disabilities to join the workforce without fear of losing their Medicare and Medicaid coverage.

"The President's Commission to Strengthen Social Security must consider TWWIIA and the President's New Freedom Initiative as it goes forward," said Bristo. "People with disabilities want to take charge of their own lives and become employed." Bristo urged Bush's Social Security reform commission to exercise due caution in their review and action on any and all proposals they consider. The NCD also implored the Bush administration to work closely with NCD and other disability groups to craft strong, forward-thinking disability income policy to bring America into the 21st Century.

Upcoming Events of Interest to the Disability Community

Sept 5

Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) Drop-in group (information & support) on first Wednesday of each month, 6-8 p.m. at Barnes & Noble Bookstore, 5th floor conference room, Kenmore Square in Boston. Call 617-247-6827 for information.

Sept 5

Women Maximizing Abilities Now, peer support group for women with physical or emotional disabilities and/or chronic conditions meets at The Women's Center, 46 Pleasant St., Cambridge, 2 - 3:30 p.m. on the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of each month. Wheelchair accessible; contact Mary Quinn at 617-354-8807 or woman@braintrust.org for more information.

Sept 6

ADA Updates 2001 - Audio Conference with Sharon Rennert of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on: ADA enforcement post-Garrett, damage awards, "direct threat," and pending lawsuits. From 2-3:30 p.m. at the Commission for Persons with Disabilities office, 51 Inman St, Cambridge. FREE, but call ahead since space is limited (617-349-4692 v / 617-492 0235 TTY).

Sept 8

Garden Party Celebrates completion of Courtyard Access Project at the Cambridge Center for Adult Education, 42 Brattle St. in Harvard Square, 1-3 p.m. New landscaping and ramp provide access, a green oasis in the city and enhance historic presence of this 1727 era house. RSVP to Diane Wortis at 617-547-6979.

Sept 11-12, 25

Demystifying Job Development, a 3-day workshop at Holiday Inn, Brookline on the process of assisting people with disabilities to obtain quality jobs. Sponsored by Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI). Registration, fee (\$150), and requests for accommodations due 3 weeks prior to the event. For more information contact Evelyn Reyes at 617-355-5371 voice/617-335-7940 fax/617-355-6956 TTY or evelyn.reyes@tch.harvard.edu.

Sept 12

ADA Updates 2001 - Audio Conference with Sally Conway of the U.S. Dept. of Justice on: Civic access in New England municipalities, ten year rewrite of Title III, access to information technology (web sites, software, printers, etc.), stadium style cinemas, the ADA Mediation Project, and enforcement priorities. From 2-3:30 p.m. at the Commission for Persons with Disabilities office, 51 Inman St, Cambridge. FREE, but call ahead since space is limited (617-349-4692 v / 617-492 0235 TTY).

Sept 13

Building a Community: An Orientation to Mass. Early Intervention for staff, families and other early childhood personnel, 9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. at Home Suites Inn in Waltham. Sponsored by the Early Intervention Training Center of the Federation for Children with Special Needs. For more information call 1-800-331-0688, ext. 159 or check www.eitrainingcenter.org.

Sept 13

CCPD Monthly Meeting - 51 Inman Street, 2nd floor conference room, 5:30 - 7:30 p.m. with period for public comment.

Sept 17

ADA Updates 2001 - Audio Conference with David Capozzi of the U.S. Access Board on: access to play areas, revised ADA and ABA Accessibility Guidelines, recreation facilities, outdoor developed areas (trails, picnic & camping facilities, beaches), passenger vessels, public rights of way, acoustics, and Section 508 standards. From 2 - 3:30 p.m. at the Commission for Persons with Disabilities office, 51 Inman St, Cambridge. FREE, but call ahead since space is limited (617-349-4692 v / 617-492 0235 TTY).

Sept 18

Disability Policy Consortium (DPC) monthly meeting, 1 - 3 p.m. at the State House (Annex), Boston. For more information call Robert Snierson, Chair, at 617-338-6665 voice / 338-6662 TTY or Juanda Shaw at 617-357-5772 voice.

Sept 19

Women Maximizing Abilities Now, peer support group at for women with disabilities / chronic conditions at 2 p.m. See Sept 5th listing for details.

Sept 20

LD/AD/HD Advocacy Group for persons with Learning Disabilities/ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is sponsored by Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) and meets at MRC Somerville Area Office at 5 Middlesex Ave, in Somerville, generally on the 3rd Thursday of each month. Task force meets 12 - 2:15 p.m. and support group meets 2:15-3:15 p.m. For more information contact Linn Morrill at Linn.Morrill@MRC.state.ma.us or 617-204-3723, or Angelica Sawyer at 617-661-3117 voice or 617-497-5257 Fax.

Sept 21

Career Fair 2001 - Reach Higher and Hire, a job fair for people with disabilities held in conjunction with Abilities EXPO at the Bayside Exposition Center, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Friday. Sponsored by Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission; for more information contact Karen Beth Mael at 617-739-9080 or Karen.mael@mrc.state.ma.us.

Sept 21-23

Abilities EXPO - a showcase of independent and assisted living products and services at the Bayside Exposition Center in Boston. See, test, and compare everything from computers to athletic equipment to daily living and mobility aids. Check web site for future details: www.abilitiesexpo.com

Sept 25-26

Community Access Monitor Training in Worcester, MA. at Executive Office of Easter Seals, 28 Providence Street. Hosted by Center for Living and Working, Inc. (CLW) and Easter Seals. Contact CLW for details, 508-363-1226. Request accommodations by Sept. 11th; see Nov 13-14 listing for program details.

Sept 26

Access Advisory Committee for the MBTA 1:00 - 3:30 p.m. at State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, 2nd floor Conference Room 1. Call 617-973-7507 voice /617-973-7089 TTY for more information or to request interpreters. Having problems with your RIDE service? Call 617-222-5123 voice, or 617-222-5415 TTY.

Sept 28

A Changing Landscape: Employment Policy & Practices for the 2000s, One day conference in Worcester sponsored by TASH and Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI). Keynote speakers are Robert Silverstein, J.D. who played central role in design, drafting, and passage of the ADA, and Joe Marrone, M.Ed., Program Manager at ICI. Registration \$70 for general audience, \$40 for family members and Self-Advocates. For more information contact Evelyn Reyes at 617-355-5371 V, 617-355-6956 TTY or evelyn.reyes@tch.harvard.edu.

Sept 29

Improving Body Image: Increasing Body Awareness, Diversity & Acceptance - free workshop for women at the Women's Center, 46 Pleasant St. in Cambridge from 11 - 12:30. For more information call 617-354-8807.

Oct 5

Genetics: Ethical Concerns for the Disability Community conference at Courtyard Marriott in Concord, NH from 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. Featured panelists include Peter Singer - Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University, Andrienne Asch - Professor of Biology, Ethics and the Politics of Human Reproduction at Wellesley, Paul Steven Miller - Commissioner of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, John Kemp - attorney, businessman and disability advocate, and several New Hampshire state officials. \$30 registration fee covers lunch and breaks. More information and registration form are available from the New Hampshire Governor's Commission on Disability, 603-271-2774 voice/TTY or e-mail Michael Jenkins at mjenkins@gov.state.nh.us.

Oct 11

CCPD Monthly Meeting - 51 Inman Street, 2nd floor conference room, 5:30 - 7:30 p.m. with opportunity for public comment.

Oct 16

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Oct 17

Deadline to Register to VOTE in Cambridge Municipal Election on Nov. 6

Oct 17

Mentoring: A Bridge to Opportunity - Annual Employment and Disability Event sponsored by Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities, 5:00 - 7:30 p.m. at the Cambridge Senior Center, 806 Massachusetts Ave across the street from City Hall in Central Square. Come for light refreshments at 5:00; Keynote speaker and panel from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Oct 18

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Nov 6

Cambridge Municipal Elections. Polls open 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Nov 8

CCPD Monthly Meeting - 51 Inman Street, 2nd floor conference room, 5:30 - 7:30 p.m. with opportunity for public comment.

Nov 11

Child and Adolescent Mental Health: Solutions for the Future - a forum sponsored by the Cambridge chapter of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI). Program includes keynote address by Marylou Sudders, Commissioner of Mass. Department of Mental Health, followed by a panel and time for questions. Begins at 7 p.m., Arlington Town Hall, 730 Massachusetts Ave. in Arlington. For more information call NAMI-Mass. at 781-938-4048 or Cambridge 781-729-5068.

Nov 13-14

Community Access Monitor Training in Cambridge, MA. at the Central Square Library, 19 Pearl Street, will be hosted by our own Commission for Persons with Disabilities. Take advantage of this great

opportunity to learn more about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and how to help your community become more accessible. This two-day (9 am - 4:30 p.m.) workshop presented by the Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD) covers regulations of the Mass. Architectural Access Board (MAAB), the ADA Standards for Accessible Design and hands-on practice taking measurements during site surveys. Fee is \$15 for consumers, \$75 for professionals; lunch is included both days. Registration DEADLINE is two weeks prior to the event (Oct. 30th) if you are requesting accommodations (large print, Braille, sign language interpreters); otherwise it is 1 week. For more information, contact MOD at 617-727-7440 voice/TTY or 800-322-2020 voice/TTY. This is a scent free event; please do NOT wear perfume, after-shave, cologne, etc. This Training is also available:

Sept. 25-26 in Worcester, MA

Oct. 24-25 in Abington, MA

Nov 18

Beyond the Ramp: Creating Mental Health Links in the Jewish Community, 12:30-5:30 p.m. at Leventhal-Sidman Jewish Community Center, Newton, MA. Sponsored by Jewish Community Centers of Greater Boston. For more information contact Judy Pearl, Director of Special Needs Services, at 617-558-6508 voice/617-965-5175 TTY or jpearl@jccgb.org.

Dec 13

CCPD Monthly Meeting & Holiday Gathering - 51 Inman Street, 2nd floor conference room, 5:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Dec 18

Employment Law and People with Disabilities: The ADA and Beyond, a one day workshop at Holiday Inn, Brookline, MA sponsored by Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI). Cost is \$75. For more information contact Evelyn Reyes at 617-355-5371 voice/617-335-7940 fax/617-355-6956 TTY or evelyn.reyes@tch.harvard.edu.

Access Notice

The City of Cambridge does not discriminate on the basis of disability. This newsletter is available in electronic mail, large print and other alternative formats upon request. To add your name to our mailing list, to inquire about alternative formats, or for information about other auxiliary aids and services or reasonable modifications in policies and procedures, contact CCPD.

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